

Analyzing Trinidad-Wright, with a Bit of "Body Shots" Thrown In for Good Measure

Written by Charles Jay
Friday, 13 May 2005 19:00

I had the opportunity to see both Felix Trinidad and Winky Wright very early in their careers. In fact, I called some of their early fights for television. In Trinidad's case I was a bit distracted because on both broadcasts I did with him, he was appearing as part of a much bigger event. The first time was in June of 1991, when heavyweight Jorge Luis Gonzalez, a Cuban defector, was making his pro debut. Gonzalez's maiden voyage carried with it quite a bit of hype, as he had been a Pan Am Games champion, beating Riddick Bowe and Lennox Lewis on consecutive nights, and the fight was being held in Miami. He drew a huge crowd for that bout, which was kind of rare for Miami. Trinidad fought Manuel Salas, who he dispatched in five rounds, but it didn't make a vivid impression on me.

Trinidad fought another prelim in Miami in October of '91. This time the main event featured Eusebio Pedroza making a comeback after five years off, so again, that's where all the focus was. I know that Trinidad brought a heavy reputation with him out of Puerto Rico, and the show's promoters told me to keep an eye on him. But the fact that he took out a pedestrian opponent named Lorenzo Bouie within one round didn't give me much time to make an evaluation.

As for Wright, he was one of a number of fighters being brought along by a Tampa-based promoter named Phil Alessi. He had come to St. Petersburg from Washington, DC, where he had put together a decorated amateur career, and because Alessi wasn't particularly interested taking risks with his fighters, Wright's slate of opponents in his first fifteen fights was somewhat less than ordinary. He outclassed these guys, of course, but he wasn't blowing too many of them away, and wasn't blowing away the audience either. Against people like Stedroy Bolus, Rocky Fabrizio, Lennell Strohman and, yes, the same Lorenzo Bouie Trinidad took out in one round just three months later (Wright won a dull six-round decision), he simply needed to look better. And I wasn't shy about saying so during the Prime Network broadcasts on which Wright appeared. I thought Wright was being lazy, considering his level of talent, and I actually liked another welterweight that was coming up at the same time - John Coward - a little better (Coward ruined his career with drug use after compiling an 18-0-1 record).

That didn't sit well with Dan Birmingham, who trained Winky then and who still trains him today. I suppose he thought that since Sunshine Network, which was producing the fights (distributed by Prime Network) had an output deal with Alessi Promotions, the telecasts should be in some way an arm of the promotion. I say I "suppose" he thought that because he never really confronted me face-to-face about it. One day I showed up at the weigh-in for a fight we were televising and was immediately pulled aside, one at a time, by no less than seven different people, all of whom told me that Birmingham had complained to everybody he could find - the promoter, the matchmaker, a few managers, my broadcast partner, and the network people - about the way I was talking about his fighter during the telecasts. I wasn't spewing the correct "company line." He felt it didn't sound good that I was being "critical" and that I should be "promoting" Alessi's fighters, particularly the Alessi fighter that was trained by one Dan Birmingham.

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All of these people told me Birmingham was trying to get me removed from the broadcast team. All of them took credit for helping me "save" my job. By the time I got to the seventh person, I was looking over at Birmingham, who was standing against the wall, and said, "You know, that's funny. I've now been here all this time and he hasn't approached ME about it."

This whole thing came as a big surprise and a bigger disappointment, since I had been friendly with Birmingham, going back to when I was first working in boxing on a full-time basis and he was doing roofing jobs during the day, and then training amateurs at night. I was also a little annoyed at this point. If I had a job that had to be "saved" over something as stupid as this, I didn't want it. So I went to the only person who really mattered - the producer of the telecast - and asked him what was going on. All he told me, basically, was, who the hell is Dan Birmingham and where in the world did a guy he never met before get the nerve to think he could control what came out of a color commentator's mouth?

End of story.

For the record, no one took Birmingham's side on the issue - not the promoter, not the matchmaker, not the other handlers, not the television people. Not anybody. And again, for the record, if Birmingham had a problem, he has, to this day, still never confronted me about it.

But Dan showed *us* who the hell he was after all, didn't he? He's got himself a world champion, featured in a "mega" fight, and just this past week he won a "Trainer of the Year" award from a group of voters who may or may not have forgotten who Buddy McGirt is.

Incidentally, as for my early criticism of Winky Wright, I still stand by it.

Of course, only a fool would contend that Wright hasn't made monster progress since those first dozen or so fights. He's worked his way up the hard way, and deserves to be in this position. Naturally, Trinidad has progressed a great deal as well; after all, I actually notice him now. The question is: who's progressed the most?

I see Wright having a hard time winning this fight. Both he and Trinidad have moved up in weight, but Felix has been at it a little longer. And Winky doesn't pack a whole bunch of KO power, which I think is what someone needs to have to keep Trinidad off him, at least to prevent him from firing shots with impunity. Wright is not a dancer. Sure, I think some movement is in his game plan, but it's not as if he is going to be traveling about the ring enough to frustrate Trinidad, as Oscar De la Hoya did for so many rounds. The truth is that Wright is most comfortable standing in front of his opponent and using good defense and countering to his advantage.

But Trinidad has the ability to punch through all that.

He's also economical with his punches, a wee bit like Joe Louis was. He couldn't make a dent in a more natural middleweight standout like Bernard Hopkins, but he can certainly deal out some punishment to a fighter - even one as good as Winky Wright - who is moving up in weight. How's Winky's chin at 160 pounds?

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There are obviously prices all over the internet on the exact outcome. At Diamond Sports International (DSI) you can get Trinidad at +180 to win by decision, and +195 to win inside the distance. Wright is +210 to capture a decision and +650 to score a win by KO, TKO or disqualification. At Pinnacle Sports, Trinidad is +235 to notch a win before the final bell and +195 to win a decision, while Wright is +595 and +310, respectively, for the same results.

As of this morning, the best prices I was able to find on Trinidad were -167 at Intertops, -182 at SportsInteraction, -197 at Pinnacle, and -200 at DSI. At some of the other sportsbooks, Trinidad action which has moved the price a bit; for example, Trinidad is -227 at William Hill and -225 at Ladbrokes, SportingOdds, BlueSQ.com and BetInternet.com. That's not the case everywhere. In a Don King press release, Robert Walker, the sports book manager at the MGM/Mirage in Las Vegas, said, "I made Trinidad minus 150. All the early money has been on Trinidad. In the last two or three days, all the money has come in on Winky Wright and the number is now minus 170 on Trinidad and plus 150 on Wright. There is a lot of sentiment for Winky Wright in this fight. The fight was at 2-1 at one time." Walker also said his establishment has at least a few six-figure bets on the fight.

Wright is getting a price of +182 at Pinnacle, with +180 at Olympic Sports and +175 at SportingOdds and SportingBet.com. Most of what else is out there is in the +160 to +170 range.

Round betting is available at a limited number of outlets. BetDirect has Trinidad at 40-1 to knock out Wright in the first round, and 20-1 to win each of the Rounds 4-10. Wright is 66-1 to stop Trinidad in each round from 5-11. He's 100-1 to win in the first round and 80-1 in the second, third and fourth. StanJames.com has Winky at 66-1 for the fifth-round knockout, but just 50-1 for all rounds from 5 to 11. Tito is 33-1 for a first-round win, down to 16-1 for Rounds 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

The over/under is solidly at 11.5 rounds, which essentially offers the proposition as to whether the fight will go the distance or not. The over is the favorite, with a high of -172 at Bet365 and a low (at least among those books we surveyed) of -135 at Olympic Sports. You can get a takeback on the under of +137 at Pinnacle and +135 at 5Dimes.

In explaining why the over/under figure is that high, Walker says, "I think they will go the distance in this fight. These guys don't go down."

Well, maybe down, but probably not out. That's why perhaps the figure of +195 for Trinidad to win a decision is the route that brings the most value. And the 40-1 prices on a knockout in Rounds 1 and 2 (available at Victor Chandler) are an interesting indulgence, just to take a shot.

Zab Judah defends his welterweight title against Cosme Rivera on the undercard. Judah is a very decisive favorite; Victor Chandler and William Hill are both offering -909 on him, with a takeback of +800 available at Olympic Sports, DSI and SportsInteraction. Wagering on Judah at SportsInteraction wouldn't be advisable, though - you'd have to lay 100-1.

The over/under for Judah-Rivera is 10.5 rounds. At Bet365 the over is favored to the tune of -125/-116 (that's not a typo; you have to lay a price either way). But at DSI the under is a

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favorite (-125, with -105 on the over).

Action is being offered on undercard fights as well. At Olympic Sports, which customarily carries a lot of boxing lines, Victor Burgos (-350) is favored over Will Grigsby (+280) in an IBF junior flyweight title fight; Michael Clark is a -120/+100 choice over Sirimongkol Singwangcha in lightweight action (seems Olympic is following Pinnacle to some extent in tightening up the lines); Junior featherweight Danny Romero (-415) gets a clear nod over Alex Baba (+355), and Randy Griffin is a slight (-115/-105) favorite over Mohammad Said in a super middleweight fight.

For the fantasy sportsbook game at Wannamakeabet.com, I compiled an over/under of 122,000 pay-per-view buys on this fight (-125 on the over, +115 on the under). We'll see if Winky can win the fight AND the fans.

(All information is presented for entertainment purposes only, and is not intended to promote the violation of any state or federal laws. Odds posted were current as of early Saturday morning. Numbers naturally are subject to change, so check first with each individual sportsbook.)